



## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

### Prevalence, Correlates, and Gendered Dimensions of Elder Abuse in Ilorin, Nigeria: A Mixed-Methods Analysis

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#### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Elder abuse represents a significant yet underexplored public health challenge in low- and middle-income countries. With an increasingly aging population and evolving family dynamics, older adults face heightened risks of mistreatment. This study investigates the prevalence, typologies, and socio-demographic determinants of elder abuse in Ilorin, Nigeria, with a focus on gender disparities and policy implications.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional mixed-methods design was employed between August and November 2023. Quantitative data were collected from 301 elderly participants through structured interviews, while qualitative insights were derived from 20 in-depth and key informant interviews. Logistic regression was used to identify predictors of abuse. Thematic analysis was conducted for qualitative data.

**Results:** Elder abuse was reported by 38.9% of respondents, with psychological (64.9%) and financial abuse (46.2%) being the most prevalent. Key predictors included older age (71–75 years), female gender, low educational attainment, unemployment, and disrupted marital status. Qualitative findings revealed caregiver burden, economic strain, and sociocultural factors as underlying contributors.

**Conclusion:** Elder abuse in Ilorin is driven by complex socio-economic and interpersonal dynamics. Effective mitigation requires multifaceted interventions, including legal reform, enhanced social welfare support, and targeted community education. Future research should explore culturally grounded prevention strategies.

**Keywords:** Elder Abuse; Mixed Methods; Nigeria; Risk Factors; Socioeconomic Factors.

#### INTRODUCTION

Elder abuse is a critical global public health challenge with significant socio-economic and cultural implications [1]. It includes physical, psychological, financial, and sexual abuse, along with neglect, occurring within family, caregiving, and institutional settings [2]. The increasing global aging population has intensified concerns about elder abuse,

particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where socio-economic instability exacerbates vulnerability [3].

In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the prevalence of elder abuse varies widely. A meta-analysis reported a high pooled prevalence across SSA, with Nigeria showing a prevalence rate of 24.1% [4]. Factors such as economic dependency, rural-urban migration, and the

weakening of traditional family structures contribute to this problem [5]. In Nigeria, research on elder abuse remains limited, although emerging studies have provided insights into its prevalence and patterns. A study in Awe, Nasarawa State, revealed a significant prevalence of elder abuse, particularly psychological and financial abuse [6]. Similarly, a study in Ekiti State identified financial abuse as the most common form, often linked to economic hardship and family financial exploitation [7]. These findings align with previous reports emphasizing economic vulnerability, cultural stigmatization, and weak legal protections as major risk factors [8]. Given these concerns, this study aimed to assess the prevalence and patterns of elder abuse in Ilorin, Nigeria, providing insight into the nature and extent of mistreatment among older adults. It also sought to identify socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to elder abuse, examining how financial dependence, shifting family structures, and societal attitudes influence its occurrence. Additionally, this study evaluated the need for policy interventions to mitigate elder abuse and improve the well-being of elderly individuals through enhanced legal protections, social welfare programs, and community-based support initiatives.

## METHODS

### *Study design*

This study employed a cross-sectional design using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection to assess the prevalence and patterns of elder abuse in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. A quantitative survey measured prevalence rates and associated factors, while qualitative methods—including in-depth interviews and key informant interviews—explored contextual experiences of elder abuse.

### *Study setting*

The study was conducted in Ilorin between August and November 2023. Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State, is located in Nigeria's north-central geopolitical zone. It has a population of approximately 3.4 million [9] and comprises three local government areas (LGAs): Ilorin

East, Ilorin West, and Ilorin South. The city's mix of rural and urban communities provided a suitable setting for examining elder abuse across diverse socio-economic contexts.

### *Ethical considerations*

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Ilorin Ethical Review Committee (UERC/ASN/2023/2570). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and interviews were conducted in private settings to protect confidentiality and participant safety.

### *Sampling strategy*

A multi-stage sampling approach was employed. First, the study area was stratified by LGA. Second, five wards were randomly selected from each LGA. Third, a systematic random sampling method was used to select households with elderly residents. Finally, one eligible elderly participant was selected per household.

The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula:  $n = (Z^2 * p * (1 - p)) / E^2$ , Where  $n$  is the sample size,  $z$  is the  $z$ -value associated with the confidence chosen,  $p$  is the standard deviation,  $q$  is  $(1-p)$ , and  $e$  is the margin of error with an estimated elder abuse prevalence of 75.8% [10]. This yielded a minimum required sample size of 282. Factoring in a 5% non-response rate, 301 respondents were included to enhance statistical power.

For qualitative data, purposive sampling was used to select 20 participants for In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), ensuring representation across sex, socio-economic status, and residential settings (urban vs. rural).

### *Eligibility criteria*

Participants included individuals aged 60 years or older who were permanent residents of Ilorin for at least six months and could provide informed consent. Individuals with severe cognitive impairments or those in institutionalized care (e.g., nursing homes) were excluded from the study.

### *Operational definitions of elder abuse*

This study adopted the World Health Organization's definition of elder abuse as "a

single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person” [11]. Elder abuse was categorized into psychological/emotional abuse, physical abuse, financial abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse. A respondent was considered to have experienced elder abuse if they reported at least one abusive act in the past 12 months.

#### ***Data collection and measurement***

Quantitative data were collected through structured, interviewer-administered questionnaires covering demographics, elder abuse experiences (self-reported incidents in the past 12 months), and caregiver/household characteristics. Qualitative data collection involved In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) with elderly individuals and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with health workers, social workers, and community leaders, using interview guides to ensure consistency.

#### ***Statistical analysis***

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (IBM) version 25. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were calculated. Bivariate analysis employed chi-square tests. Multivariate analysis used logistic regression to determine predictors of elder abuse, reporting adjusted odds ratios (AORs) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs). Statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ . Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using ATLAS.ti software.

### **RESULTS**

#### ***Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents***

The majority of respondents (53.5%) were aged between 60 and 65 years, with a decreasing number of participants in older age groups, suggesting either lower life expectancy or reduced survey participation among the oldest elderly. There was also a sex imbalance, with 89.4% of the respondents being female, which may reflect the higher life expectancy of women or their greater willingness to participate in such surveys. Marital status data shows that 33.2% were widowed, reinforcing

the vulnerability of elderly women who may lack spousal support. Additionally, 43.2% of the elderly were unemployed, while only 36.5% remained employed, highlighting significant economic dependence, which could contribute to financial abuse (Table 1).

#### ***Prevalence of elder abuse and its types***

With an overall prevalence rate of 38.9%, the data suggests that elder abuse is a pressing issue in Ilorin. Psychological abuse (64.9%) emerged as the most common type, which aligns with findings in other developing countries where emotional mistreatment is more socially acceptable and harder to detect and also reflects the social and emotional vulnerabilities of the elderly in Ilorin. Financial abuse (46.2%) was also highly reported, suggesting that economic exploitation of older adults is widespread, especially among those dependent on relatives. Neglect (40.2%) was a significant concern, possibly due to changing family structures and reduced caregiving support. Physical (26.5%) and sexual abuse (20.5%) were less frequent but remain serious issues requiring further intervention (Table 2, Figure 1).

#### ***Pattern of elder abuse***

The data from Table 3 reveals a disturbing pattern of elder abuse among the 117 respondents, with psychological abuse emerging as the most prevalent. Forms such as exclusion or being ignored by a child (82.1%), prevention from seeing loved ones (76.9%), and belittling or undermining (69.2%) were commonly reported. Insults (64.9%) and threats (61.5%) also featured prominently, indicating deep emotional distress inflicted by close relations.

Physical abuse was less frequent but still significant. About a quarter of respondents reported being slapped (26.5%), locked in a room (21.4%), or beaten (20.5%), with some experiencing severe actions like being burned, tied, or attacked with a weapon, though less commonly.

Financial abuse was widespread, affecting nearly half of the respondents. Many were coerced into giving up property (46.2%),

defrauded (43.6%), or had their resources used without consent (43.6%).

Sexual abuse was alarmingly present, with 31.6% reporting attempted forced intercourse and 29.5% experiencing it under threat or force. Neglect was also reported, with 40.2% denied food and others lacking access to basic needs like clothing and medical care.

#### ***Sociodemographic predictors of elder abuse***

The study identifies key sociodemographic factors associated with elderly abuse. Older adults aged 71–75 were significantly more likely to experience abuse compared to younger seniors. Marital status was also influential—married and especially separated/divorced individuals faced higher abuse risks than those who were single. Religion showed a notable trend, with Christians being less likely to experience abuse than Muslims, possibly due to differences in support systems. Employment status was protective; full-time employment significantly reduced the likelihood of abuse, while part-time and self-employed individuals were more vulnerable. Similarly, occupation type mattered—those in farming or trading, or with no occupation, were at greater risk. Educational level played a critical role: having no formal education was strongly linked to increased abuse, emphasizing the protective value of education (Table 4).

Overall, the findings suggest that elder abuse is shaped by a mix of personal, social, and economic factors. Targeted interventions should prioritize support for older adults with limited education, unstable work, and disrupted family structures to effectively reduce their risk of abuse.

#### ***Distribution of elder abuse***

Women reported higher rates of abuse than men across all types of elder abuse, with psychological abuse (67.1%) and financial abuse (47.8%) being the most prevalent. Even for physical (27.3%) and sexual abuse (21.2%),

women reported slightly higher rates, highlighting the gendered nature of elder abuse (Figure 2).

#### ***Findings from the qualitative study component of the research***

A total of 21 participants contributed to the study, including 6 In-Depth Interview (IDI) participants and 15 Key Informant Interview (KII) participants. Most IDI participants were aged between 36 and 45 years, while the KII group was largely composed of individuals aged 36–45 years (46.7%), followed by those over 45 (33.3%).

The IDI findings revealed personal and situational factors that lead to elderly abuse. These included aggressive or impatient caregiver attitudes, work-related stress, and a lack of understanding about the aging process. Caregivers expressed frustration over the demanding nature of elderly care, especially when working alone or receiving low wages.

The KII responses offered a broader perspective, highlighting structural and societal issues. Financial difficulties, lack of companionship, and neglect were identified as significant challenges faced by older adults. Contributing factors to abuse included poor parental relationships, long distances between adult children's workplaces and their elderly parents, and negative peer influence. In some cases, abuse was driven by financial motives, such as attempting to access an elderly person's assets. The loss of a spouse also emerged as a psychological and emotional trigger that could increase vulnerability to abuse.

Overall, the combined findings indicate that elderly abuse stems from a complex blend of personal, familial, and societal pressures. Addressing this issue requires targeted support for both caregivers and elderly individuals through improved awareness, training, and social support systems.

**Table (1):** Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents (N = 301)

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Age Group (years)</b>		
60 – 65	161	53.5
66 – 70	73	24.3
71 – 75	35	11.6
76 – 80	9	3.0
≥81	23	7.6
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	32	10.6
Female	269	89.4
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	9	3.0
Married	179	59.5
Separated/Divorced	13	4.3
Widowed	100	33.2
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	108	35.9
Islam	193	64.1
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Employed	110	36.5
Unemployed	130	43.2
Retired	61	20.3

**Table (2):** Prevalence of elder abuse (N = 301)

Elder Abuse Type	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Psychological Abuse	78	64.9
Financial Abuse	54	46.2
Neglect	47	40.2
Physical Abuse	31	26.5
Sexual Abuse	24	20.5
Total Elder Abuse Cases	117	38.9



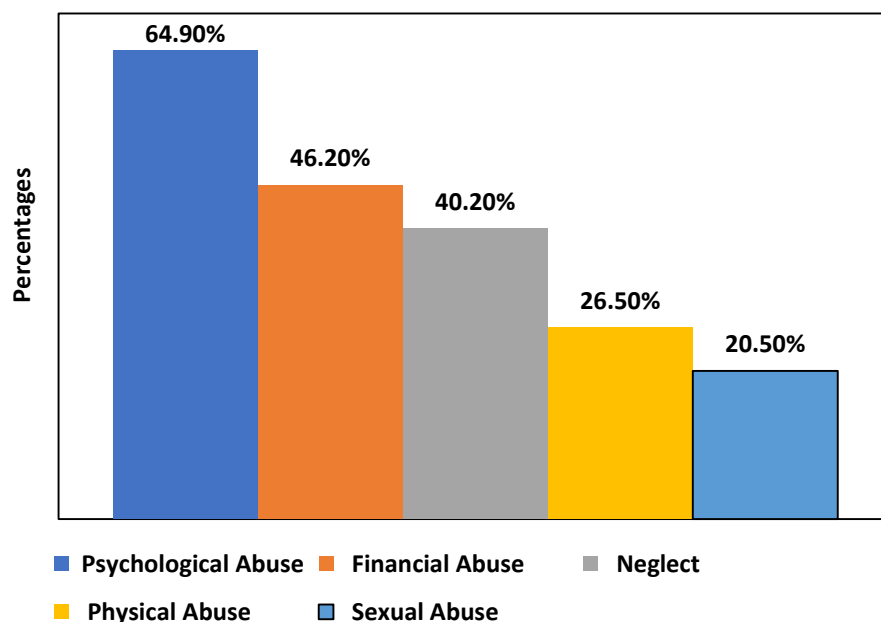
**Table (3):** Pattern of elder abuse (n=117)

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Psychological abuse</b>		
Insult or sworn at	76	64.9
Undermining or belittling	81	69.2
Exclusion or ignoring by child	96	82.1
Threatened to harm others that respondent cares about	28	23.9
Prevented respondent from seeing those he/she cares about	90	76.9
Did something to spite respondent	51	43.6
Threatened to hit or throw something at respondent	72	61.5
Blamed respondent for misfortune	26	22.2
Prevented respondent from participating in social activities	22	18.8
<b>Physical abuse</b>		
Slapped	31	26.5
Kicked	15	12.8
Pushed/Shoved	25	21.4
Burned or scalded on purpose	24	20.5
Thrown something that hurts	21	17.9
Twisted arm	12	10.3
Used weapon	9	7.7
Pushed or hit with something that couldn't hurt	15	12.8
Beaten	24	20.5
Tied with a rope	15	12.8
Locked in the room	25	21.4
Given too much medicine to control or to make sleepy	12	10.3
Attacked with a weapon	6	5.1
Slammed against a wall	9	7.7
<b>Financial Abuse</b>		
Given money, possession or property against respondent's will	54	46.2
Tried to take money, possession or property from respondent by Fraud	51	43.6
Attempted to be robbed of money, possession or property or robbed or used property without permission	51	43.6
Forced to sign documents against will or pay for services against a wall	16	13.7
Impersonated to obtain goods/refused to be paid owed money such as rent	29	24.8
<b>Sexual Abuse</b>		
Touched in a sexual way against will	24	20.5
Tired to have sexual intercourse against will	37	31.6
Had sexual intercourse against will by using force or threat	34	29.5
<b>Neglect</b>		
Prevented from having food	47	40.2
Prevented from having clothing	16	13.7
Prevented from having medical care	15	12.8

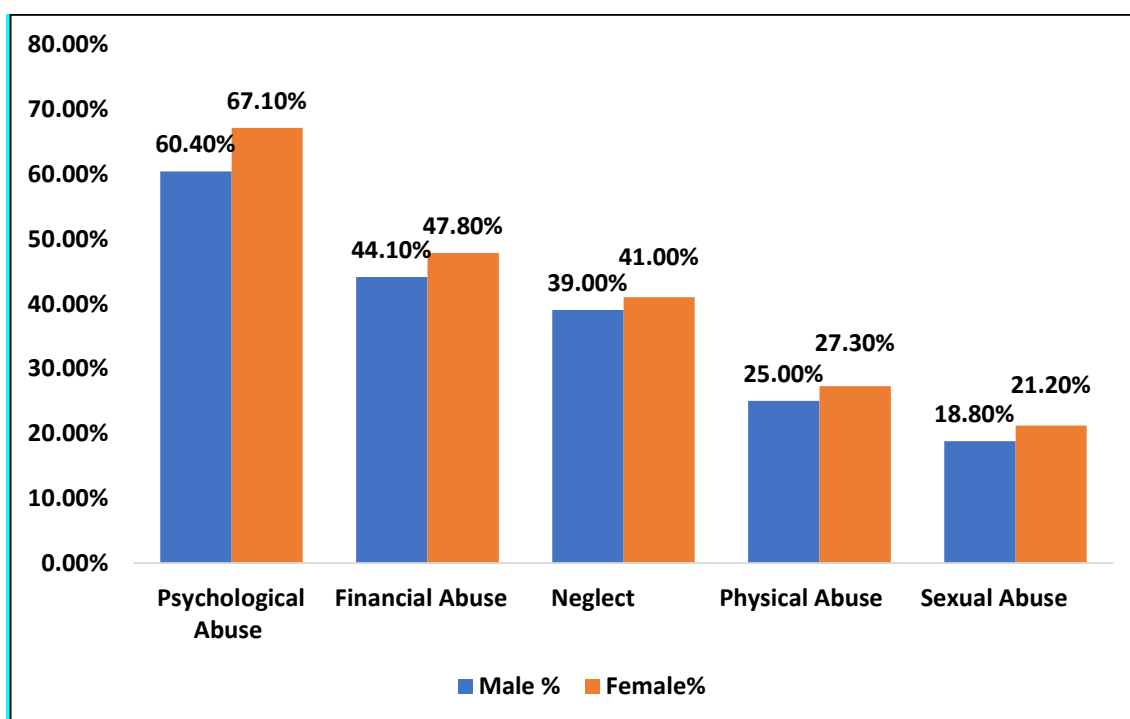
**Table (4):** Sociodemographic predictors of elderly abuse

Variables	$\beta$	p- value	AOD	95 % CI
<b>Age group</b>				
60 –65	RC			
66 –70	-0.611	-.228	0.543	0.201 – 1.465
71 –75	1.695	0.031	0.184	0.039 – 0.855
76 –80	1.794	0.074	6.015	0.838 – 14.136
≥81	-0.192	0.831	0.825	0.141 – 4.825
<b>Marital status</b>				
Single	RC			
Married	2.276	0.035	9.741	1.177 – 80.644
Separated/Divorced	3.410	0.022	30.265	1.625 – 56.693
Widowed	0.502	0.662	1.652	0.174 – 15.659
<b>Religion</b>				
Christianity	RC			
Islam	2.492	0.001	0.083	0.028 – 0.243
<b>Employment status</b>				
Employed	4.783	0.001	0.008	0.001 – 0.098
Unemployed	5.058	0.001	0.002	0.001 – 0.039
Retired	RC			
<b>If employed</b>				
Employed full time	2.875	0.001	0.056	0.009 – 0.364
Employed part time	2.180	0.026	0.113	0.017 – 0.769
Self employed	RC			
<b>Occupation</b>				
Farming	1.834	0.028	6.261	1.218 - 32.180
Trading	2.495	0.001	12.124	2.775 – 52.959
Artisan	0.679	0.464	1.971	0.320 – 12.150
None	3.461	0.004	0.031	0.003 – 0.322
Others (Civil servant, contract worker, surveyor)	RC			
<b>Highest level of education</b>				
No formal education	3.045	0.001	0.048	0.010 – 0.218
Primary education	-0.868	0.304	0.420	0.080 – 2.198
Secondary education	-0.051	0.954	0.950	0.168 – 5.377
Tertiary education	-0.991	0.254	0.371	0.068 – 2.037
Postgraduate	RC			

AOR, Adjusted Odd Ratio; RC, Reference Category



**Figure (1):** Prevalence of elder abuse types



**Figure (2):** Gender distribution of the studied group of elders in relation to abuse type

## DISCUSSION

This study reveals that nearly four in ten older adults (38.9%) in Ilorin experience some form of elder abuse, with psychological (64.9%) and financial abuse (46.2%) being the most prevalent. These findings align with studies conducted in Ekiti and Nasarawa States, where

emotional and economic maltreatment emerged as dominant forms of abuse [6, 10]. The high rates of psychological abuse—ranging from verbal insults to social exclusion—underscore the invisibility and normalization of emotional harm in many households [3, 10].



The gendered disparities in reported abuse, with women consistently experiencing higher rates across all categories, reflect deeper societal structures. Elderly women, particularly widows, are often stigmatized or accused of witchcraft, heightening their vulnerability to emotional, financial, and sexual abuse [7, 12]. This is consistent with prior findings in Nigeria, where widowhood and traditional beliefs were associated with social ostracism and neglect [5, 12]. Additionally, women's limited access to resources and legal protections compounds their risk [13].

Financial abuse, a major concern in this study, often involved coercion, fraud, and unauthorized use of the elderly's property or funds. This pattern mirrors the increasing economic dependency of the elderly on family members, particularly in the context of high youth unemployment and a weakened pension system [6, 14]. As multigenerational households shrink and economic pressures rise, intergenerational conflict becomes more likely, increasing the potential for both intentional and unintentional neglect [4, 15].

The Social Ecological Model (SEM) serves as a valuable framework for interpreting these findings. At the individual level, age, gender, low educational attainment, and economic dependency emerged as significant risk factors [10]. Interpersonal-level dynamics—particularly caregiver burden, spousal loss, and strained parent-child relationships—also played a critical role [15]. At the community level, factors such as rural-urban migration reduced familial proximity and caregiving support [14]. Finally, at the societal level, weak legal protections, inadequate social welfare programs, and entrenched cultural norms perpetuate an environment in which elder abuse is underreported and poorly addressed [8, 13].

Qualitative findings further contextualize these patterns. Caregivers described emotional exhaustion, financial hardship, and a lack of training in elderly care as major contributors to abusive behavior. In many cases, abuse was not deliberate but rather the product of unmet caregiver needs and structural neglect by the

state. These insights point to the importance of addressing elder abuse not only through individual or familial interventions but also through broader social policies that support both older adults and their caregivers [15].

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights that elder abuse in Ilorin is multifactorial, rooted in both systemic inequities and shifting familial relationships. Addressing it requires a multisectoral approach, integrating legal reforms, caregiver support programs, community education, and accessible social welfare schemes. Importantly, future research should explore intervention models that are culturally grounded and community-driven, ensuring both the protection and dignity of Nigeria's aging population.

**Conflict of interest:** None.

**Financial disclosures:** None.

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## Citation

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